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JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

PERSONNEL QUESTIONS

Advantages and disadvantages of the post classification system

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly the comments of member organizations of the Administrative Committee on Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Advantages and disadvantages of the post classification system" (A/47/168).

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Comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination

1. The Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) has considered the report of the Joint Inspection Unit, entitled "Advantages and disadvantages of the post classification system" (A/47/168), and has found it to be a useful document providing an excellent overview of the classification standards and procedures in the organizations of the United Nations common system. It is evident that the post classification concept is well understood and fully accepted by all organizations, which recognize it as one of the cornerstones of an effective human resources management system providing foundation for other personnel functions, such as recruitment, remuneration, human resources planning and career development. The particular difficulties encountered by various organizations in the area of post classification are well covered in the report.

2. Members of ACC noted, however, that a major issue which has not been addressed in the report is the overall level of professional salaries in the United Nations common system. The Inspector mentions in several places the pressures and strains placed on the classification schemes of the various United Nations agencies. ACC believes that much of this pressure results from managers' legitimate concerns to recruit and retain well-qualified staff to carry out programmes in the face of inadequate salary levels. The classification mechanism is often seen as the only way to provide necessary financial rewards. Were United Nations salaries to rise to a more appropriate level, many of the problems reported by the Inspector would decrease significantly.

3. While noting that there could be difficulties with immediate implementation of some of the recommendations, ACC supports, in general, the conclusions and most of the recommendations presented in the report. The specific comments of ACC on individual recommendations are set out below.

Recommendation 1: Reinforcement of the capacity of personnel services

4. ACC agrees with the conclusion regarding the need to strengthen the authority of personnel services in the area of post classification and to provide adequate resources and staffing to classification programmes of the organizations. However, budgetary constraints currently being experienced by most organizations of the common system are making it difficult to achieve that aim.

Recommendation 2: Training courses for classifiers and programme managers

5. This recommendation is fully supported by ACC. Wherever possible, staff members are encouraged to attend appropriate training courses. Full implementation of this recommendation, however, is contingent on the availability of financial resources for training activities in the field of job classification.

Recommendation 3: Automated processes for classification

6. While automated classification systems have their uses, they should be seen as an additional tool among the many available to classifiers to assist in arriving at an appropriate decision on the correct grading of a post. In accordance with the work programme endorsed by the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions Subcommittee on Job Classification, a detailed software development plan for the implementation of this system, together with cost estimates, will be completed shortly and reviewed jointly by the secretariats of CCAQ and International Civil Service Commission.

Recommendation 4: Implementation of the classification results

7. ACC agrees that the implementation of classification decisions should be centralized as one of the main functions of human resources management. At the same time due account should be taken of the roles of appointment and promotion bodies and programme managers, as well as of personnel and budgetary policies established by the governing bodies. It is imperative that measures be taken to ensure that classification levels of posts are correctly reflected in the programme budgets of organizations where the posts are budgeted by specific grade levels.

Recommendation 5: Information to staff

8. ACC shares the view that staff should be familiar with the concept and procedures of classification. Organizations are achieving this aim through general distribution of related administrative instructions and information circulars. Other measures, such as briefings and training in job classification, are being considered by a number of organizations.

Recommendation 6: Reclassification of posts

9. In all organizations of the common system, the process for the initial classification of posts is identical to that of any subsequent reclassification.

Recommendation 7: Appeals mechanisms

10. ACC agrees with this recommendation. Most organizations already have well-developed and functioning systems for review and appeals of classification decisions.

Recommendation 8: Levels of classification of P-1 and P-2 posts

11. ACC endorses the proposed study of the P-1 and P-2 levels so as to address the difficulty in filling such posts, especially when they require highly technical qualifications.

Recommendations 9 and 10

12. In principle, ACC does not object to a study to be undertaken by ICSC, of problems outlined in these recommendations.

13. Members of ACC were not unanimous, however, in their appraisals of these problems. Thus, WHO, while appreciating the thinking behind proposals to revert to a broader use of P-1 and P-2 level posts and to consider "the scaling down and underfilling of posts" in order to "attract new and qualified staff", expressed some hesitation about studying those issues in isolation from a broader review of career development policies for the United Nations system. UNIDO considers the underfilling of posts, or applying a system of linked grades, as being an impractical solution which might hamper career progression of staff and would be contrary to the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. IAEA would not find the underfilling of posts or the application of linked grades practical in recruiting technical specialists in view of its rotation policy and the need to acquire full expertise upon recruitment. FAO is currently filling some of its posts at a lower-than-classified level and would welcome a study on the introduction of linked grades if it were limited to certain types of junior professional posts with limited career prospects. While most organizations of the common system do not accept the concept of personnel promotions, some organizations use that policy on a limited scale, for example, ILO and others believe that a small percentage of personal promotions should greatly impact on employees' morale (UNIDO, IAEA).